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Inland Empire study center in works

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Professors at Claremont McKenna College have conjured up a proposal that would be a first for the two-county region: the Inland Empire Center for Economics and Public Policy. On the economic side, the research organization would be akin to research groups at UCLA and Chapman University, which crunch numbers, analyze trends, gather consumer and business data, spew out reports and make predictions about where the local and state economies are headed.

Political studies would also play a role. Local voting trends and congressional seats would be watched.

"We're the 14th biggest (metropolitan statistical area)," said Dave Huntoon - a fellow at The Rose Institute of State and Local Government - about the San Bernardino-Ontario-Riverside region. "There really isn't a place to go ... that provides the full gamut of resources across economics and government. We think it's a good time to make our resources available to the Inland Empire."

Funding is an issue. Huntoon wouldn't comment on how much money organizers need to raise or who the potential donors are, but he did say that large donations would help get the center off the ground much faster.

"We're talking to people, and will be talking to people," he said. "I would hope it would be in 2010."

Similar organizations across the nation burn through tens of thousands of dollars each year, if not millions. Wealthy alumni and multi-million-dollar corporations are usually the donors.

The center would develop a regional index of economic indicators, focusing on the sub-regions of Ontario-Rancho Cucamonga, San Bernardino-Redlands, Riverside-Corona, Temecula-Murrieta, the High Desert and the Coachella Valley.

"This isn't a 'wanna be' sort of deal," Huntoon said. "This is recognizing the importance of the Inland Empire."

The Rose Institute and The Lowe Institute of Political Economy, both research groups at the college, recently published the first "**Inland Empire Outlook**," a report that analyzes recent political and economic trends and looks at what's around the corner.

"It's a teaser," said Ralph Rossum, director of The Rose Institute. "It's the kind of thing that donors of this new (center) could expect from our ongoing work."

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